



The Rural Clinical School of Western Australia

Driving in the Kimberley – Standard Operating Procedure

Current as at the 23rd January 2014

Welcome to Kununurra!

One of the great opportunities we have when we live in the Kimberley is access to the bush, unsealed roads, magnificent scenery and the sense of freedom and adventure that comes with that. We get to know, and feel a growing connection, to the place. Driving is an integral part of being able to access this opportunity and is a valued activity in the RCSWA.

Unfortunately driving is also the single riskiest regular activity in the Kimberley. A number of students and staff over the past decade have hit cattle or lost control on an unsealed road in the north of the State, causing considerable damage. Elsewhere in the state RCS staff and students have lost friends or colleagues to crashes.

Driving in the Kimberley is not like a quick jaunt down the road. Precautions need to be taken and preparation is important.

This policy must be adhered to for all trips while in the RCSWA, and read in conjunction with the RCSWA driving policy and the 2 relevant UWA policies:

<http://www.safety.uwa.edu.au/topics/off-campus/driving> <http://www.safety.uwa.edu.au/topics/off-campus/field-work-remote>

On EVERY trip, the RCSWA requires:

- **A safe vehicle**
- **A safe driver**
- **A safe journey plan**

A Safe Vehicle

RCSWA cars and 4WD:

The RCSWA is responsible for ensuring the vehicle is road-worthy, and appropriately fitted out. The driver is responsible for checking tyres, oil, water and noting any change in condition that may indicate a problem. If you note any concerns relating to the safety of an RCS vehicle please contact your local administrative person as soon as possible. All RCSWA vehicles are covered by a roadside assist programme (RAC).

Private vehicles:

The owner is responsible for ensuring the vehicle is road-worthy, and appropriately fitted out. The RCSWA makes an assessment 'on paper' of any cars brought to site in the "Assessment of Country Driving" form filled in prior to orientation.

All vehicles leaving the town boundary must be in good – excellent mechanical condition and must have:

- Good – excellent tyres

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- A spare tyre (The Gibb River Road is famous for its **sharp rocks** and has a bad reputation for shredding tyres.)
- 5L water / person / day, including some in a container that can be carried with you if you need to leave the vehicle.
- Detailed Maps / Navigation Aid
- Communication Device (e.g. mobile phone and car charger) but be aware that you will lose reception a few kilometres out of Kununurra.
- A good tool kit.
- Small first aid kit
- A blanket
- A roadside assist programme (e.g. RAC = \$113 per year per car)

Pre-travel vehicle check:

Before every trip, ensure the vehicle is fit for the journey (by visual inspection and checking gauges).

Motorbikes:

Students are **not** permitted to travel by motorbike while on RCSWA-related journeys.

A Safe Driver

As with all drivers, staff and students must have a valid driver's licence and adhere to all traffic regulations. Always wear a seat belt.

Obey all road signs! In particular temporary signs such as 'road closed' or signs related to dangers ahead.

Preparing for travel on country and remote roads:

- All students must pass the pre-RCSWA driving course.
- All students and staff must complete an "Assessment of country driving experience" form when commencing with the RCSWA. This form will be reviewed and signed off by the lead MC / administrator in each site. If areas of concern are noted, these will be discussed and an individual plan created to address concerns.
- Ensure you have sufficient fuel. You may travel vast distances between service points. Find out where exactly you can refill your tank. You might need jerry cans.
- Call ahead to check road conditions and plan alternative routes in case your original route is inaccessible. Flooded roads can be particularly problematic. Road conditions can be found on the local shire website, www.swek.wa.gov.au, and Main Roads WA website www.mainroads.wa.gov.au.
- Notify someone of your departure date, proposed destination, the routes you intend to take and your estimated time of arrival. Let them know when you arrive.

USE OF RCSWA VEHICLE OR OWN VEHICLE ON RCSWA BUSINESS

If you are using the RCSWA vehicle or on RCSWA business, you must fill out a driving plan and adhere to RCSWA guidelines.

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No RCSWA staff or student can drive if:

- Tired
- Under the influence of alcohol or other drugs

A Safe Journey Plan

Staff and students need to be aware of the conditions they are heading into, aware of the risks they may face in their year in the Kimberley and to take appropriate steps to minimise these risks.

This includes regular journeys which may be part of the Kimberley experience or related to RCSWA requirements.

Some general points when travelling remotely:

- Find out about culturally sensitive locations before you go. Obey signs when you get there and check with locals to make sure you do the right thing.
- Leave gates as you find them – if closed then close them behind you, if left open then leave open.
- Don't stay around bores/gates/windmills/tanks or cattle yards without landholders permission.

Risks when driving in the Kimberley:

Risk	Relevant information / measures
Gravel roads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow down on unsealed roads and reduce your speed to suit the conditions. There is less traction on gravel roads & it is easier to lose control, compared to driving on a bitumen surface. • Engaging 4 wheel drive when driving on unsealed roads improves traction and provides more control. • If traffic signs warn of a gravel road ahead, slow down while you are still on the bitumen. • Follow tyre tracks wherever possible - this will provide firmer ground. Keep away from the loose gravel on the edge of the road, it could pull you off the road and may cause your vehicle to roll over. • Slow down for corrugations - the old adage about speeding up to travel over the top may appear to work for small corrugations, but you could lose traction. When corrugations get severe you may lose control of the vehicle. • Watch out for the slope or camber of the road on corners, as it could be sloping in the wrong direction & cause you to skid off the road if you are travelling too fast. • ABS will work differently on gravel & may increase your braking distance. If you have to brake heavily be aware of the difference in the braking sensation of ABS. • Consider using a lower gear when driving. It will give you better

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	<p>control & enable you to use the engine as a brake rather than relying on the brakes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Try to steer & brake as smoothly as possible. Jerky or sudden braking or steering will increase the risk of your vehicle skidding.• Watch out for dust ahead. It could be a sign of an oncoming vehicle, or it could signify that you are coming up behind a vehicle. Switch your headlights to low beam when driving in dust.
Poor roads	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some roads in WA are dusty or prone to flash flooding.• Traffic on unsealed roads can raise a dust cloud that will obscure your vision.• Roads may be washed out due to Monsoonal rains.• Heavy use of local vehicles on unsealed roads may result in deep tyre tracks and ruts.• Sand tracks may be unsealed and not well maintained.• Depending on bushfires and heavy rains, road conditions can change in a short period of time.• Main Roads Western Australia is responsible for Broome Road, Derby Highway, Great Northern Highway and Gibb River Road. Before travelling on these roads, it is advisable to check on their website, www.mainroads.wa.gov.au for updates, or call them on 138 138.
Road trains (up to 53m long, 2.5 metres wide and have up to 3 trailers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure the road ahead is clear when overtaking.• Overtake quickly; don't hesitate. Take extra care when overtaking. To pass, you need to be able to see at least two kilometers of clear road ahead.• Allow the road train plenty of room to brake & maneuver.• Make allowances for the wind buffeting your car as you pass.• Allow the road train to remain on the bitumen, if the road is narrow. This will minimize flying debris from the many wheels of the larger vehicle & reduce dust.• Be patient.• Do not pull out onto a road when a road train is approaching.• Road trains require a great stopping/breaking distance.• Do not stop on narrow sections of road.• Do not overtake near junctions as road trains may require two lanes in order to turn.• If a road train is approaching from the opposite direction and the road is narrow, pull over off the bitumen if necessary & allow as much room as possible.• The driver will sometimes use his indicator to tell you when it is safe to pass.
Animals on the road (stock and wildlife)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Many of our roads are unfenced and on remote Kimberley roads, cattle and kangaroos can appear from nowhere. NEVER swerve to miss, as this can cause accidents. Slow down if you can to avoid impact. Be alert of calves on the side

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	of the road. They are very unpredictable.
Travelling on remote roads	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Always let someone know where you are going and your expected time of arrival. Call or text immediately when you get to your destination.• Carry appropriate recovery gear and water etc.
Extremes of weather (e.g. heat, rain, cold)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Get up-to-date information about road and weather conditions. Intermittently UWA will send out email warnings and these must be followed.• Updates are also available from the Bureau of Meteorological site www.bom.gov.au, main Roads WA website www.mainroads.gov.au. Road condition reports are available from the Shire website www.swek.wa.gov.au.
Breaking down	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• STAY with your vehicle. Don't leave it to walk for help. Your vehicle is your shelter and an easy thing to see.• Do not attempt to open a radiator of a vehicle to check for water, if the engine is hot. Leave it for several hours to cool, as it will be scalding hot.• If you need to change a tyre, ensure that your vehicle is in a safe place and is pulled well off the road. Ensure your own safety by being aware of passing vehicles.• Take care when changing flat tyres that your vehicle is on a stable base.• Your engine must be turned off.• Passengers out of the vehicle.• Put the hand brake on and engage the vehicle in gear.• Put a block/rock behind and in front of wheels that are not flat. Loosen the nuts of the flat tyre before jacking up.• Have the spare wheel ready for putting on before jacking up the car.• Make sure the jack is in the correct position so that it can't slip.• Make sure nuts are tight, stop and check them again after about 50kms.
Lost signal on mobile	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Think about mobile phone cover in your area and whether another device is required (e.g. sat phone, UHF radio, GPS tracking device).• Telstra has the best coverage in the Kimberley.• The RCS has a satellite phone which should be taken in cases where there is limited or non-existent mobile coverage.
Bushfire	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Put your headlights on low beam.• Wind up windows, and engage the recycle option for air.• Follow advice of police or fire-fighters, if available.• Remain away from the fire until safe to pass through.• Smoke can obscure oncoming vehicles, so drive with care.• Fires can move fast and are unpredictable so don't be a hero. Hot embers, wind and animals may be a danger to you.

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Floods/Dust	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some roads in WA are dusty or prone to flash flooding.• Traffic on unsealed roads can raise a dust cloud that will obscure your vision.• Watch for approaching vehicles that may throw up stones, which may damage your vehicle or cause injury.• Only overtake if you can see well ahead.• Never drive into flood waters, or creeks without first ascertaining that it is safe to do so. If you are not sure, don't attempt to cross. Either go back to where you have come from, or sit and wait until the water goes down.• If in the Kimberley/North West, make sure that rivers or creeks don't contain crocodiles.• Check for depth of water – depth indicators show level.• Check for wash-out areas. Walk the road if necessary but take care.• Be careful of floating logs and debris and the speed of the water flow.• If safe to cross, engage low gear and drive in that gear (don't change gear while crossing water). Don't stop until you reach the other side.• Once safely across, touch the brake pedal a few times to dry out brakes.
Injury / illness on the road	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In remote areas, do the best you can with the resources that you have around you (towels, items of clothing, sticks as splints, your car as a shelter/shade/protection from elements)• Make sure person/persons are protected from elements – rig up shade or rain cover.• The ground can be hot so beware of burns secondary to laying on hot ground or road surface.• Use satellite phone if there is coverage. Activate EPIRB if one is available.• If there is no satellite or mobile coverage and there is more than one vehicle travelling, send someone to the nearest station/settlement with information regarding the location and number of people injured/involved.• If person/persons stable and you need coverage of satellite phone, you can climb a tree if one is nearby.• Stay with your vehicle.• If you are away from your vehicle/camp try to set up some sort of signal or sign of your presence.• Make sure you have water available.• If there is no coverage and you have let someone know the time of your arrival, then be prepared to wait.

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Journeys outside this SOP	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Requires a driving plan.• When driving the Gibb River Road (700km) or One Arm Point Road (202km), obey all road sign directives.• Let a responsible person know where you are going and what time you expect to arrive.• If you go to gorges or rivers, or swim in the ocean, check depth before diving in.• Ensure the swimming area does not harbour crocodiles.• Before undertaking trekking or climbing hills, make sure your level of fitness is adequate.• Carry plenty of water.• Make sure you wear a hat – Slip Slop Slap.• Wear boots or appropriate shoes, no sandals or thongs.• Have an appropriate first aid kit, which includes snake bit bandages.• Take a torch and spare batteries.• Make sure you take insect repellent. Ross River Virus, Barmah Forrester Virus, Murray Valley Encephalitis, and other insect born viruses exist up here. Midgies (little minute flying insects) also cause acid burns to skin so take care around mangrove areas.
Night driving	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Night driving is not allowed on RCSWA required journeys.
Long trips	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't drive more than 10 hours per day• Don't drive when you are tired• Share driving with others• Plan a stop at least every three hours for 20 minutes.• Don't plan to drive after a day's work.• Plan to have a good night's sleep before you go.
Driving into the sun	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plan your trip to avoid driving into the sun, if possible.• If you must drive into the sun, wear adequate/appropriate sun glasses.• Keep your speed down as visibility can be impaired.• Put your lights onto low beam.• Make sure your windscreen is clean.• Take extreme care if you have to overtake, there may be an oncoming vehicle that you are unable to see due to sun in your eyes.• Take extreme care of animals crossing the roads as you may not see them due to sun glare.• If necessary, stop until the sun has gone down sufficiently so that it is safe to resume driving.•

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Driving in Heavy Rain	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In the Kimberley it is not unusual to encounter very heavy rain. Slow down, put your lights on low beam, and use windscreen wipers on appropriate speed.• If too dangerous, pull off onto the side of the road and wait for the storm to pass.• Take care of flash flooding in some areas (take note of signage).• After the rain has passed, continue driving but touch your brakes gently a couple of times to dry them out.
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Last Updated 17/01/2013 Elaine Wienand

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